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Subsection 1.8 Fundamentals of an Inspection

Fundamentals of an Inspection

Introduction

Most environmental public health specialists have several areas of technical responsibilities: food, water, sewage, childcare, and lodging. Many times these areas overlap and to successfully inspect a facility an environmental public health specialist must be knowledgeable about the rules and regulations regarding all of these arenas.

Fortunately, there are some general inspection skills that can be applied whether you are conducting a motel, convenience store or childcare facility inspection. The Department of Health and Senior Services has been charged with the responsibility of conducting inspections. The responsibility of the local public health agency to conduct inspections comes from conditions of the core public health contract between the Department of Health and Senior Services and the local public health agency, or from local statutes, rules, ordinances or codes.

If your municipality has local ordinances that assign regulatory authority to your agency, copies of the ordinances should be available from your county or city clerk. Inspectors should have copies of the local ordinances they are required to enforce on hand at the office and in the field.

It is essential that you familiarize yourself with the laws and rules that your job will require you to enforce. In addition, you need to have a clear understanding of which of your responsibilities are outlined in local ordinances, and which are assigned to you as a part of the core public health contract. An inspector does not need to memorize the statutes and rules they enforce, but must have a good, strong working knowledge of what constitutes a violation of public health law.

Remember, local ordinances may be more stringent than state law, but may not be more lenient; except for commercial lodging. If local codes do not address a topic covered in the state law, the inspector must still be familiar enough with state laws and rules to enforce those public health measures appropriately.

When there is no local ordinance to enforce, the local public health agency is granted the authority to conduct inspections of regulated facilities under state statutes and regulations through the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services core public health contract.

Under this contract, local public health agencies without food ordinances shall inspect retail food establishments such as grocery stores and restaurants under Missouri statutes and rules.

The licensing, safety and sanitation requirements for lodging establishments are regulated under Missouri statutes and rules. However, some municipalities and/or counties have local ordinances regarding fire safety, electrical wiring, fuel-burning appliances, plumbing and swimming pools/spas which may be less stringent than state laws and rules.

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Child care facilities, whether they are child care centers, group homes, family homes or license-exempt facilities, are regulated and inspected by the Department of Health and Senior Services and by inspectors at the local public health agencies under contract.

Several counties have their own regulations regarding the construction and operation of onsite wastewater disposal systems. Others are contracted to regulate onsite sewage under Missouri statutes and rules.

Inspection Policy/Written Work Plan

The core public health contract requires that all local public health agencies (LPHA's) have a system in place to routinely inspect and provide follow up inspections of regulated facilities. These regulated facilities include food establishments, food processing facilities and lodging establishments. In order to have a systematic process in place to assure a quality comprehensive environmental health program each LPHA needs to develop an inspection policy/written work plan to guide their environmental health activities. The inspection policy/work plan must include a protocol for determining inspection frequencies; define when follow up inspections are conducted and procedures for response to complaints. Each LPHA must maintain an accurate and up-to-date inventory of all regulated facilities (food establishments, food processing facilities and lodging establishments) within their jurisdiction. At a minimum, the list needs to include the name of all establishments, their location, risk prioritization (food establishments), and most recent inspection date. This inventory should be made available to DHSS upon request for contract monitoring or survey purposes.

Inspection Fundamentals

The files and records for regulated facilities are a wealth of information and the first place you should go for information about an upcoming inspection. Before any field visit or inspection, always review the files.

The inspector will need to know general facility information: the name of the owner or manager, the facility street address, hours of operation, perhaps the menu or number of children the facility is licensed to care for, etc. Knowing the hours of operation of an establishment is critical, as inspections should be conducted when the facility is open for business, for example: while preparing food, caring for children, or in operation for the tourist season.

Also, during your file review, note the date and time of the last inspection. Inspections should be conducted according to the frequency required by policy. Conducting food inspections at different times of day at each visit may allow the inspector to observe different staff or different foods prepared. Some administrators allow or encourage inspections after normal work hours and on weekends, to gain a more complete picture of the facility.

A file review should also include a review of the establishment's inspection history. By reading the file, the inspector can become familiar with the facility and its previous violations. A copy of the most recent inspection report will be essential in the field to determine which violations have

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been corrected and which are ongoing problems. Do not take the only copy of the file from the office into the field, as its contents could be damaged or lost.

Part of field preparation is also gathering the appropriate paperwork. Be sure to take enough blank copies of the forms with you. In addition to the paperwork, every inspector needs equipment. The equipment necessary for inspections vary depending on the type of inspection, but will include in general a clipboard, flashlight, pens and copies of the applicable rules for reference. A camera can be a useful tool for any type of inspection.

Bring lab forms, water sample bottles and a cooler with ice packs if the facility is served by a non-community water supply. A marker or permanent pen may be useful for labeling sample bottles.

As more agencies use computers for inspections, the necessary equipment list may change to include extra printer cartridges, blank paper, the computer and printer, as well as power supply cords or car chargers.

Food Inspection Equipment

Specific equipment needed for a food safety inspection include: alcohol prep pads or sanitizing wipes, dial-stem thermometers, a thermocouple, heat-strips or Thermo labels for a dish machine, test strips for sanitizers, and hat or hair restraint. If conducting a Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) inspection, a data-logger is essential.

Lodging Inspection Equipment

Specific equipment needed for a lodging inspection include: a circuit tester to check wiring, a dowel rod or some other rod to test smoke detectors, and a water chemistry test kit. Water chemistry test kits should be routinely checked to insure that the reagents or test strips have not expired or been otherwise compromised.

Onsite Sewage Inspection Equipment

Onsite sewage inspections may require the inspector to have boots, raingear, and measuring wheel or tape measure, or even a laser range finder for measuring long distances and a laser level, rod and tripod. A map may be required to navigate unfamiliar locations around the county or city.

Childcare Inspection Equipment

Specific equipment needed for a childcare inspection include: alcohol prep pads or sanitizing wipes, dial-stem thermometers, heat-strips or Thermo labels for a dish machine, test strips for sanitizers and a water chemistry test kit for swimming pools, if applicable.

Emergency Response Equipment

Preparation for the unexpected will pay off. Since the duties of an environmental public health specialist include responding to environmental emergencies, it is important for all environmental public health specialist staff to consider what equipment and forms would be needed to respond

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to an emergency. Preparing a kit that is ready at all times will save time when it really matters. An emergency response kit should include many of the items already mentioned as well as personal items, like clothing and toiletries, necessary if the response becomes an overnight or several day activity. Since emergency response may happen under disaster conditions, consider keeping protective gear, like steel-toed shoes and a helmet, with the kit as well. The Department of Health and Senior Services supports a Ready-in-3 program to assist Missourians in preparing for an emergency. Additional information can be accessed at:

http://www.dhss.mo.gov/Ready_in_3/Materials.html

Routine, Follow-up and Complaint Inspections

Generally, inspections or investigations that an environmental public health specialist conduct can be classified as routine, follow-up or complaint inspections.

A routine inspection is a comprehensive inspection of the facility conducted according to a pre-determined schedule. For the most part, a routine inspection is an unannounced inspection. Childcare and lodging facilities receive annual inspections. Routine food service inspections are made at a frequency that is determined by the risk that the facility poses to the public. This determination is based on the facility type, population served, foods prepared and past history of the establishment.

Follow-up or re-inspections are scheduled when an inspector notes violations that are imminent health hazards, cannot be corrected while on-site, and/or do not comply with a specific regulation. Generally, any violation noted during a lodging or childcare inspection requires follow-up. Some agencies will establish criteria to determine if a re-inspection is required in their food safety program based on the number of critical violations or total number of violations. Re-inspections generally only check the violations noted from the routine inspection. The date for the follow-up inspection is determined and discussed with the establishment manager at the time of the routine inspection.

Sometimes an inspection is made in response to a complaint. Complaints can come from customers or employees of an inspected facility, other public health professionals, and health care providers. At the minimum, receipt of a complaint should result in a visit to the facility to determine the validity of the complaint. Before investigating a complaint, it is important to do a file review and see when the last inspection was made and what violations were recorded. If the complaint alleges conditions noted in the previous inspection, and they could pose an imminent health risk, a full inspection may be necessary. Of course, inspectors are not required to respond to complaints about non-regulatory problems at a facility, such as poor customer service.

Conducting an Inspection

Being properly prepared is the key to a successful inspection. Review the file and carry a copy of the previous inspection. Take the inspection forms and equipment needed to conduct all the inspections planned for the day. During the inspection, be observant, ask open ended questions, listen, don't rush, and try not to obstruct the flow of work. Produce an inspection report that clearly describes the violations observed. During the exit interview, use this time to clearly

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describe the violation and explain why it is a violation. If possible, provide a reasonable corrective measure. The more education you can provide the easier your job will be. Most important of all: know the law, rule or ordinance governing all of your inspections.

When beginning an inspection, contact the facility manager upon arrival, introduce yourself, and explain the reason for your visit. Be sure to dress professionally and wear your identification badge. If available, take along a copy of the previous inspection to follow up on objectionable conditions noted. Problems that were cited on the last inspection report should have been corrected by the next routine inspection. The inspector will need to note which problems are ongoing.

If possible, respect the needs of the establishment when choosing the time and date of the inspection. Consider the needs of the establishment's customers and staff when planning routine inspections. Inspecting a buffet or chef's station before or after a lunch rush, for example, can let the inspector observe the practices of the establishment and still let employees assist customers. Visiting a hotel when the fair is in town or the big game is going on will likely make for a more stressful inspection for both the inspector and the hotel manager. Visiting a childcare center during naptime can interfere with the need for a quiet, dark environment. Being considerate of the fact that the business needs to continue operating while the inspection is being conducted costs you nothing and goes a long way towards building a cooperative relationship with the establishment's management.

Invite the owner or manager to accompany you during the inspection. Generally, someone from management will escort you through the facility during a lodging inspection. Other establishment managers are often too busy to stay with the inspector, but the invitation will demonstrate that you wish to have a professional and pleasant working relationship. Conducting the inspection with the manager is a good way to determine if the manager is aware of environmental health laws and regulations. Having the manager with you also allows corrections of problems to be made during the inspection. However, a manager may try to distract you in the hope that fewer violations will be noted; therefore, maintaining your own pace and focus throughout the inspection will prevent you from being steered off course.

Following a logical path or route through a facility can help to make sure your inspection has been thorough. For instance, by following the flow of product through a food facility from receiving through storage, preparation and service, the inspector can think about environmental health concerns at every step of the way without missing important areas. This orderly process can be used for an onsite wastewater construction inspection as well. The inspection would begin at the house and tank, and proceed through to final soil treatment and dispersal. With a lodging inspection, the inspector might begin with looking at the mechanical and laundry rooms and then inspect the sleeping rooms. Devising a standardized system for each type of establishment will help to perform thorough and complete inspections.

If an inspector is not thorough, there is no reason for the inspection. Open every refrigerator, flush every toilet, turn on every sink and check every smoke alarm. The public depends on you

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to protect them from environmental hazards. It is up to you to be sure that, when you leave the establishment, you have documented everything in your jurisdiction that could affect public health, and you have made arrangements for those conditions to be corrected.

Inspection Reports

There are two thoughts for preparing an inspection report: to take notes while conducting an inspection and then transferring that information onto the final inspection report or to write the violations directing onto the final inspection report while conducting an inspection. Be mindful that notes the inspector takes during an inspection must be clear and useful to the inspector when writing the final report; missing information in the notes can lead to improperly recorded or missed violations, which are at best inaccurate and at worst can result in false information on a legal document. However, the inspector's notes on who to contact at the establishment and issues discussed with the managers, like scheduled equipment upgrades, new products to be added, can be useful from one year to the next. These notes should be as professional in content and tone as any other report.

Remember to write what you see and a corrective measure if it will help correct or more clearly explain why the item is a violation. An example of this would be: "Gravy, green beans and roast pork on the steam table are 120 degrees." That describes the violation but providing a little more would explain how to correct and what would be compliant. So you might add: "Foods held hot for service should be at 135 degrees or above, these items need to be reheated to 165 degrees." This same technique can be used for childcare inspections or lodging inspections. For example, the violation: "Room 130 door doesn't close." would provide more information if written, "Room 130 door doesn't self-close. All sleeping room doors leading to interior corridors must self-close".

Opinions are always inappropriate on a legal document. Do not write, "Production line equipment should be updated," or "The hotel décor is out of style." Observations about the facility that do not fall under the jurisdiction of the inspector should not be recorded on an inspection report. For instance, lack of smoke detectors is not a violation of the food code, and should not be written on the inspection report for a restaurant.

Following every inspection or investigation, the inspector should meet with the manager or owner to review inspection findings. Critical violations or violations that may pose an imminent health hazard will need to be corrected, if possible, before the inspector leaves. It is during this exit interview that the inspector clearly describes the violations and discusses corrective measures, as well as dates by which the violations must be corrected and the date for any follow-up inspection.